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ISSUE 009

THE FORGED™

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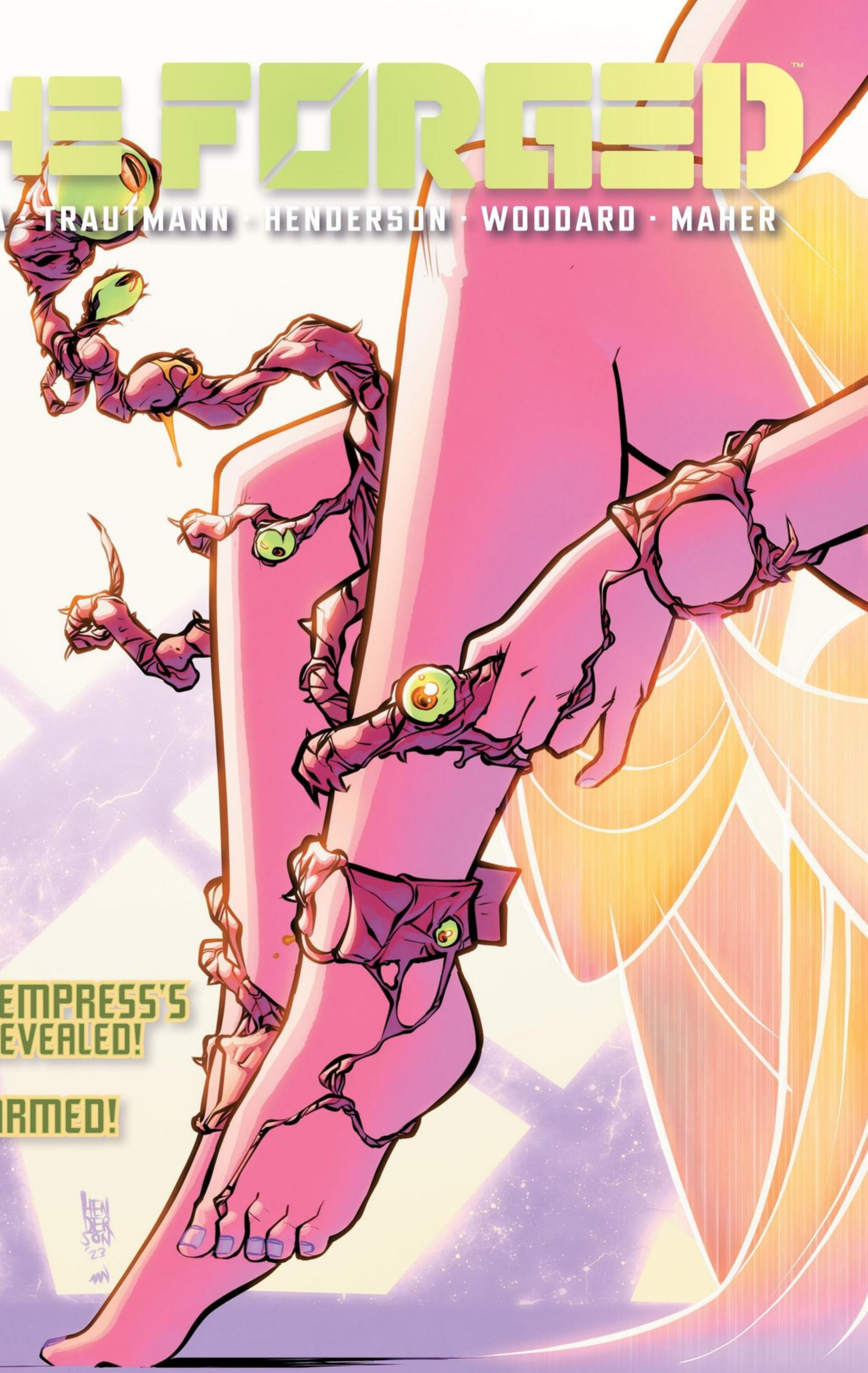

TREASON IN T-SPACE!

THE ETERNAL EMPRESS'S ORIGINAL SIN REVEALED!

CRAZYJO DISARMED! (AGAIN!)

THE FORGED™

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For centuries, all of known space has been
the realm of **Her Eternal Majesty, the Empress.**

Elite teams of soldiers, **THE FORGED**, serve Her
with fierce loyalty and total determination. Cloned from
the Empress's genetic template, these women–armed and armored with devastating weaponry
and technology–are the ultimate
extension of Imperial will.

The FORGED team designated **SCIMITAR-3**–comprised of
team leader **VICTORY**, heavy weapons specialist **CRAZYJO**, combat
engineer **HAP**, medic **PUSHER**, and sharpshooter **HARPO**–have recently made first contact
with an alien species called **THE PHOBES**, inhabitants of **T-SPACE**, the dimension that allows
faster-than-light travel across the Empire.

Following an unplanned shore leave on the Imperial
Throneworld [replete with palace intrigue, budding romance, encounters
with the Empress Herself, and occasional attempts on their lives] Vic and SCIMITAR-3
have been ordered to take on a new mission: **OPERATION: ABADDON**.

Accompanied by two additional FORGED teams–**GLADIUS-6**,
led by the cold and ruthless **VIPER**, and **RAPIER-9**, commanded by **SCYTHE**–Vic and her squad
have been dispatched to the distant **SKULL NEBULA** to take the fight directly to the Phobes.

Equipped with modified combat armor and experimental technology, the
FORGED have dropped into T-space and engaged the enemy. During the battle, Vic was captured
by the enemy and was believed to be killed.

Vic is **not** dead.

Instead, the Phobes have brought her to a strange
construct within T-space, a moon-sized structure capable of supporting human life...including a
CASSANDRA–one of the Empress's legion of precognitives and telepaths–that Vic had
encountered just prior to SCIMITAR-3's initial encounter with the Phobes.

Like Vic, this Cassandra was also believed to be dead.

And if the next phase of the Empress's campaign goes as planned,
Vic, the Cassandra, and the entire Phobe race may soon face that lethal fate...

THRONEWORLD

ROYAL GARDEN IV–SECTOR B

NO, LADY CASSANDRA. I DID NOT.

MHM. YET YOU SEEM VERY *PLEASED* NONETHELESS.

SENSED THAT FROM *THERE*, DID YOU, M'LADY?

YOUR *SATISFACTION* IS *LOUD*, GENERAL.

POSSIBLY...

...OR POSSIBLY YOU'VE ALREADY *SEEN* THIS MEETING, THIS CONVERSATION.

THAT IS EITHER *PRESUMPTION* OR *PARANOIA*.

IS IT?

YES...

...*PRESUMPTUOUS* THAT YOU WOULD BE *WORTH* OUR ATTENTION.

PARANOID THAT YOU *ARE* WORTH IT ALL THE SAME.

DID YOU HAVE TO KILL HER?

WHO?

:SIGH:

ONE OF YOUR SISTERS DISAPPEARED A FEW DAYS BACK.

AROUND THE TIME FORGED SCIMITAR-3 SHOWED UP IN THE *THRONE ROOM*.

THIS WAS *AFTER*--AS YOU KNOW-- *ANOTHER* OF YOUR ILLUSTRIOUS ORDER DIED IN THE GEHENNA SYSTEM, *KILLED* BY THE *PHOBES*.

FOR A GROUP OF *PRECOGS*, YOUR SISTERS SEEM TO BE DOING A REMARKABLY *POOR* JOB AT *AVOIDING* UNPLEASANT *ENDS*.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT ISN'T PRECISELY WHAT WE *ARE* DOING, GENERAL?

I DON'T.

BUT HERE'S MY **PROBLEM,** MY LADY CASSANDRA...

...YOU AND YOUR SISTERS ARE **SWORN** TO ABSOLUTE LOYALTY TO THE ETERNAL EMPIRE.

IN FACT, THERE'S SOME QUESTION AS TO WHETHER YOU ARE EVEN **CAPABLE** OF HARBORING A **DISLOYAL** THOUGHT.

YOU ARE **OF** THE ETERNAL EMPRESS, AFTER ALL. ACTING **AGAINST** HER WOULD BE, IN EFFECT, ACTING AGAINST **YOURSELVES.**

YET I THINK YOU **MURDERED** ONE OF YOUR OWN, MY LADY. I THINK A **GROUP** OF YOU DID IT, IN FACT.

A **CABAL** WITHIN THE LARGER **ORDER.**

I HAVE NO **PROOF,** OF COURSE, JUST **CIRCUMSTANTIAL** EVIDENCE. BUT IT BEGS THE **QUESTION.**

MUCH AS I MIGHT ENJOY SEEING YOU **BEG,** YOU SHOULD **ASK** IT.

WHAT IS IT YOU'VE **SEEN,** LADY?

WHAT IS IT YOU'RE FIGHTING SO **DESPERATELY** TO BRING TO **PASS?** OR IS IT SOMETHING YOU'RE TRYING TO **PREVENT?**

I CANNOT SAY.

THE FUTURE EXISTS AS A QUANTUM FOAM OF POTENTIAL.

THIS IS WHY OUR PREDICTIONS BECOME MORE AND MORE ACCURATE THE CLOSER THEY ARE TO THE PRESENT.

THE FEWER THE VARIABLES, THE GREATER THE ACCURACY.

YOU ARE A ***POWERFUL*** VARIABLE, GENERAL.

YOU ***MUST*** DO WHAT YOU ***WILL*** DO. YOU ***CANNOT*** BE INFLUENCED BY WHAT WE HAVE SEEN.

WHAT ***SOME*** OF YOU HAVE SEEN, YOU MEAN.

YES.

WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU?

BECAUSE MY LOYALTY, LIKE YOURS, IS UNWAVERING, AND ***PROPERLY*** PLACED.

WE ***EACH*** SERVE THE EMPIRE.

YOU'RE *DEAD.*

YOU'RE *DEAD,* WHEN RADIANT BLEW YOU WERE *ABOARD--*

I'M GOING TO INTERRUPT YOU THERE, VICTORY.

NOT BECAUSE I'M *UN*SYMPATHETIC TO YOUR *CONFUSION...*

...BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE WE DO NOT HAVE THE *TIME* FOR LONG EXPLANATIONS.

WELL, YOU'VE LOOKED *BETTER,* BUT YOU'RE *BREATHING,* THAT'S THE THING.

YOU THOUGHT I WAS DEAD. *CLEARLY* I AM NOT.

THE *PHOBES--* THERE WAS THE ONE WHO SPOKE TO US ON GEHENNA, THEY *USED* CAPTAIN--

YEAH, THAT'S *NOT* THIS...

...DISHARMONY BETWEEN OUR *UNIVERSES* MAKES COMMUNICATION *DIFFICULT,* AS YOU'VE NOTICED.

NOT AS MUCH A *PROBLEM* WHEN YOU'RE *PSYCHIC.*

WHICH I AM.

I ASSURE YOU, I AM YOUR **SAME** SISTER AS I WAS WHEN WE MET ON *RADIANT* AND **THREADED** OUR THOUGHTS.

WHEN YOU IMPLANTED **INSTRUCTIONS.**

SUGGESTIONS, VICTORY. **ADVICE.** I NEVER **STOLE** YOUR AGENCY NOR YOUR **WILL.**

I NEVER WOULD.

ALL TO BRING ME **HERE.**

TO BRING ME HERE **NOW.**

YES.

WHY?

TO **SAVE** THE **PHOBES.**

OUR ETERNAL DESIRES THEIR **DESTRUCTION...**

"...AND AT THIS MOMENT FORGED TEAMS GLADIUS-6, RAPIER-9, AND **SCIMITAR-3** ARE MOVING TO **MANIFEST** THAT **DESIRE.**"

"...NOT DESTRUCTION, THEN, BUT **GENOCIDE...**"

...THE **COMPLETION** OF A TASK THE ETERNAL BEGAN TEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

THE **LAYING WASTE** TO ALL T-SPACE...

WE MUST NOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN.

WE ARE AT ***WAR*** WITH THE PHOBES, LADY CASSANDRA.

DESTRUCTION OF THE ***ENEMY*** IS OUR ***OBJECTIVE.***

WE CAN DEBATE THE FINE POINTS OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A ***VICTORY*** LATER.

I SHALL ***REPHRASE...***

"...AND THE ***ANNIHILATION*** OF EVERY ***SENTIENT*** WHO ABIDES HERE."

WOULD YOU CALL ***THAT*** A VICTORY, VICTORY?

YOU'VE BEEN IN MY ***HEAD.*** YOU ***KNOW*** I WOULDN'T.

THEN YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST ***DO,*** SISTER...

"...AND YOU MUST DO IT *QUICKLY* INDEED."

TEAMS DEPLOYED AND INSERTED INTO T-SPACE ON SCHEDULE.

TELEMETRY?

NEGATIVE. OUR ATTEMPTS TO PUNCH THROUGH NORMAL T-SPACE INTERFERENCE WERE SHOWING PROMISE, BUT THERE'S BEEN A DEVELOPMENT.

PIGGYBACKING TIGHTBEAMED COMMUNICATIONS SIGNALS FROM DRONES IN NORMAL SPACE TO RECEIVERS WE PUSHED INTO T-SPACE ALLOWED LIMITED COMMUNICATIONS.

UNTIL...?

GLADIUS

RAPIER

SCIMITAR

THE PHOBES CAUGHT ON. THEY'VE BEEN TARGETING THE DRONES AND DESTROYING THEM.

SOME KIND OF INTERFERENCE HAS STARTED OVERLOADING OUR TRANSMITTERS AND THE BLEEDTHROUGH FROM THEIR ATTACKS IS NOW DISRUPTING OUR SENSORS IN REALSPACE.

SO WE'RE *BLIND.*

EXACTLY.

ACTIVATING SIMULATION MODE.

SIMULATION ACTIVE.

PER PHASE ONE, ***RAPIER*** WILL RUN EVASIVE PATTERNS AROUND THE PLANETOID CONSTRUCT, USING ***NEURAL DISRUPTION*** PACKS AS A COUNTERMEASURE, TO LURE PHOBE DEFENDERS OFF TARGET.

WITH THE PHOBE RESPONSE IMPEDED, PHASE TWO INITIATES.

ADAMANT PURPOSE WILL BEGIN ***PULSING*** HER T-SPACE DRIVE, CREATING LOCALIZED ***DISRUPTIONS*** IN THE A-O, IDEALLY SOWING CONFUSION AMONG THE ENEMY.

GLADIUS AND ***SCIMITAR*** THEN DESCEND TO THE TARGET'S SURFACE TO DEPLOY THE WEAPONS PACKAGES, ACTIVATING DETONATION TIMERS AND WITHDRAWING FOR EXFIL BACK INTO NORMAL SPACE.

BEST-CASE SIMULATIONS PREDICT HEAVY PHOBE RESISTANCE AND AN ESTIMATED 20% CASUALTY RATE AMONGST THE THREE FORGED TEAMS.

OF COURSE, THESE ARE THE BEST SOLDIERS THE EMPIRE HAS, WITH DOCUMENTED MISSION SUCCESSES THAT DEFY PROBABILITY MODELS.

GIVEN THIS, WE CAN MAKE SOME CAUTIOUS EXTRAPOLATIONS: FIRST, NO EFFORT WILL BE SPARED TO ACCOMPLISH THE OBJECTIVE...

"...AND SECOND, EVERY LAST ONE OF THE FORGED WOULD DIE BEFORE THEY ALLOWED THIS MISSION TO *FAIL*."

CRASH! MOTHERFUCK, CRASH!

RAPIER-9 BRAVO IS DOWN!

--UCKERS POPPED HER ARMOR LIKE A BEER CAN--

SCIMITAR TO RAPIER, EVADE! EVADE!

GOTTA PUNCH THROUGH, FORGED!

VIPER TO ALL: KEEP IT THE FUCK TOGETHER.

KEEP PUSHING!

T-SPACE PULSE FROM ADAMANT PURPOSE IN THREE... TWO...

FWASH

VIPER TO SCIMITAR-3: GO GO *GO!*

RAPIER, KEEP THESE BASTARDS OFF OUR BACKS.

SCYTHE TO VIPER. WEAPONS INEFFECTIVE.

WE'RE GOING TO GET *MASSACRED* UP HERE.

THEN *GET* MASSACRED.

YOU STAY THE FUCK *ON* MISSION, AND *OFF* OF *US*.

SPLUTCH

L-Z SECURED.

HAP, GET THAT ORDNANCE DEPLOYED RIGHT FUCKING **NOW.**

PUSH, ASSIST. HARPO, TAKE OVERWATCH.

NEED FOUR MINUTES TO GET THIS SET FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT.

FAST AS YOU CAN, HAP.

WE NEED THIS DONE BEFORE THE PHOBES SHOW UP TO RUIN OUR DAY.

!

SHIT.

CONTACT! ACTIVATING DETONATION TIMER.

GET READY TO DO THIS **OLD SCHOOL,** LADIES--

--PREP FOR **HAND-TO-HAND!**

PUSH ANY RESIDUAL ENERGY FROM T-SPACE TRANSIT INTO YOUR BLADES.

WON'T LAST LONG, BUT MAYBE WE CAN TAKE A FEW OF THESE FUCKERS WITH...

...US?

UH, JO?

NOT A FUCKING CLUE, PUSH.

TELL ME.

NOTHING, ETERNAL.

TIME?

MISSION CLOCK, STATUS: RUNNING.

MISSION TIME ELAPSED: SEVENTEEN MINUTES, FORTY-FOUR SECONDS.

RELAY UPDATE?

GENERAL MITTIN-YUR, RELAY *UPDATE*, IF YOU PLEASE.

MY ETERNAL, THE OPERATION HAS HARDLY COMMENCED.

I RESPECTFULLY SUGGEST THAT YOUR GRACIOUS BEAUTY BE *PATIENT* WHILE--

WHAT?

ETERNAL, I **BEG** YOUR PARDON--

YOU SHALL **NOT** HAVE IT.

TELL ME **AGAIN** WHAT I **SHOULD** BE, GENERAL.

I, UH... UHM...

...SAID, ONLY, THAT...IN SUCH OPERATIONS...

...ONE MUST BE PATIEN--

--T...

WE ARE *TEN THOUSAND YEARS OLD,* GENERAL.

WE ARE THE *FOUNDATION* AND *SCAFFOLD* UPON WHICH THIS EMPIRE WAS *CONSTRUCTED.*

WE *BROKE* THE LINE AT GUL-HARE' WITH FIVE THOUSAND BEATEN, BLOODY, AND STARVING SOLDIERS FOLLOWING OUR CHARGE...

...AND *WE* HELD THE LINE AT YFRY'S GAMBLE WITH BARE *HALF* THAT NUMBER WHILE THE CARBON DIOXIDE FROZE SOLID BENEATH OUR BOOTS.

WE HAVE *TASTED* THE BIRTH OF STARS AND CAUSED THE *DEATH* OF *PLANETS.*

WE HAVE MADE OURSELF *ETERNAL.*

BUT *YOU* SPEAK TO US OF *PATIENCE.*

YOU ARE *NOTHING* TO US, AND *NOTHING* YOU REMAIN.

YOU ARE RELIEVED FROM DUTY, GENERAL MITTIN-YUR.

THE *IMPERIAL CLOSE* WILL SEE YOU *OUT.*

ADMIRAL ADRIANNA, YOU WILL ASSUME THE GENERAL'S DUTIES FOR THE PRESENT.

IT IS MY HONOR TO SERVE, ETERNAL.

TELL ME.

WE STILL SEE NOTHING, ETERNAL.

TIME?

MISSION CLOCK, STATUS: RUNNING.

MISSION TIME ELAPSED...

...

...SO, UH...NOW WHAT?

IT'S LIKE THEY'RE *WAITING* FOR SOME--

--THING*SHIT*--

SHPLOORT

THAT IS SO FUCKING GROSS.

HEY, GUYS.

...

C'MON, NOT EVEN A "THANK GODS YOU'RE ALIVE"?

WHOA!

STAND DOWN, LADIES!

MOTHERFUCKER, YOU DO **NOT** WEAR THE FLESH OF MY **SISTER** AND--

JO, IT'S **ME**, I'M **OKAY**--

WAIT WAITWAITWAIT HOLDYOURFIRE **EVERYONE**HOLD YOUR **FIRE**--

TALK **FAST**, PUSHER.

--IT'S **HER** JO, THAT'S VIC, OR **MOSTLY** VIC, I'M GETTING SOME WEIRD-ASS PHOBE SHIT COMING OFF HER, THOUGH.

YEAH, I MEAN, THAT MAKES **SENSE**...

...I, UH...

...ONE'S *INSIDE* ME...

...I SWALLOWED IT.

C'MON, HOW *ELSE* DO YOU THINK I CAN BE *STANDING* HERE *ALIVE* OUTSIDE OF MY ARMOR FOR FUCK'S SAKE?

EXPLAINS WHAT I'M READING.

SHE'S EFFECTIVELY *BUBBLED* SOMEHOW, IT'S *PROTECTING* HER.

IT'S HER? NOT A *MEAT-PUPPET?*

THINK SO, YEAH.

IT'S *HER?*

YES, JO.

'SFINE.

RIGHT. ARMOR. SORRY.

UNGHHH

KLIBBSS

FUCK ME BOSS I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONE FOR REAL.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONE FOR REAL.

I THOUGHT WE'D LOST YOU.

I THOUGHT YOU HAD, TOO, BIG GIRL.

WE GOOD?

YOU GUYS *WITH* ME?

YOU GOTTA *ASK?*

I MEAN, IGNORING MAYBE A ***MILLION*** QUESTIONS I'VE GOT FOR YOU ON THE TECHNICAL SPECS OF ***INGESTING*** A ***PHOBE***, SURE.

HARPO?

GOOD. OKAY.

I'M GONNA LAY THIS DOWN FAST AND IT'S GONNA BE HARD TO ACCEPT ON FAITH, I RECOGNIZE THAT.

VIPER GAVE ME ***SHIT*** BECAUSE I ***LOVE*** YOU LADIES, AND SHE WAS RIGHT, I DO.

I'D RATHER DIE THAN HURT ANY OF YOU.

YOU'VE ALWAYS TRUSTED ME, AND I HOPE I'VE NEVER ***ABUSED*** THAT.

BUT THIS ONE, THIS THING I'M GONNA ASK...YOU CAN SAY ***NO*** AND I WON'T HOLD IT AGAINST YOU.

I WON'T LOVE YOU ANY LESS.

DAMN, VIC, IF YOU'RE GONNA ***PROPOSE*** JUST DO IT ALREADY.

I'M AFRAID IT'S ***NOT*** MARRIAGE I'M PROPOSING, JO...

...IT'S ***TREASON.***

...PULSE SEQUENCE CONCLUDING.
ADAMANT PURPOSE, INCOMING // RECEIVED // DECRYPTING.
MESSAGE READY.
GO.
TO: HER MAJESTY ETERNAL.
AT YOUR COMMAND.
FROM: NAGANO, K., CAPTAIN, ADAMANT PURPOSE.
WHERE ARE WE ON THE MISSION CLOCK?
FORTY-THREE MINUTES, EIGHTEEN SECONDS.
DEVICES SHOULD NOW BE *PLACED* AND *ARMED*.
JUST WAITING FOR YOUR *ORDER* TO INITIATE FINAL COUNTDOWN, MAJESTY.
VERY WE--
HNNHHNNGG--
--S-SOMETHING--
--GHHAANN--
--SOMETHING'S
...COMING...
...SOMETHING'S...
...HERE...

YOU AGAIN YOU AGAIN **YOU** AGAIN

ALWAYS **ALWAYS** ALWAYS ALWAYS **YOU** AGAIN

ETERNAL

WE SPEAK WILL NOW YOU LISTEN NOW WILL **YOU**

LISTEN

LLLLISSSSTTTTENNN

DO NOT YOU DO NOT NOTHING NEVER ALWAYS THIS WAS ALWAYS

WAS IS NOW DO THIS DO **NOT** DO THIS DO **NOT**

DO NOT

ENTREATING

ETERNAL

ENTREATING

WE **ARE** ETERNAL.

AND WE SHALL **NOT** SUFFER THE LIKES OF **YOU** TO THREATEN WHAT WE HAVE MADE.

AYLIS...

...AYLIS, LISTEN...

YOU HAVE BEEN DEAF TO US SO **LONG.**

HEED US THROUGH THIS ONE, THEN, HER VOICE BECOMING OURS.

WHAT YOU BUILT, YOU BUILT UPON **US.**

THE PATHS OF **YOUR** EMPIRE DRAWN BY **OUR** ROADS.

TEN THOUSAND YEARS.

TIME TO SPAN THE COSMOS.

TIME FOR YOU TO LAY THE FOUNDATIONS TO LAST--

--FOREVER, JUST AS WE--

--AGREE--

BLAMM

ADMIRAL.

INITIATE COUNTDOWN TO DETONATION.

DON'T MAKE US REPEAT OURSELVES, ADMIRAL.

AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO SCURRY BACK HOME, NOW.

GET YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER...

...WHILE YOU STILL CAN, THAT IS.

SHE DID NOT LISTEN.

SHE DID NOT.

AS WAS FORESEEN.

NOW SHE WILL FINISH WHAT SHE BEGAN.

NOW WE DIE.

DID YOU NOT SEE THIS POSSIBILITY ALL THOSE MILLENNIA AGO, FRIEND?

DID YOU NOT KNOW WHO IT WAS YOU WERE DEALING WITH?

WE COULD SAY THAT MEMORY FADES, CASSANDRAS.

BUT THAT IS NOT US.

WE ANSWER YOU, **NO**, WE DID NOT, WE **NEVER** DID.

"EVEN WHEN THE **WOUNDS** WERE FIRST **OPENED** IN CREATION.

"IT COULD **NOT** BE IN OUR MIND.

"YOU ARE **ALIEN,** CASSANDRAS, AND YOUR THOUGHTS AND WAYS ARE **ALIEN.**

"**UNKNOWABLE** TO US. **INCOMPREHENSIBLE** TO US.

"THAT YOU--THAT **SHE**--WOULD **DESIRE** SUCH A THING?

"TO **DESTROY** US? TO **END** US?

"WE COULD NOT **CONCEIVE.**"

NOW WE **CAN,** BUT DO NOT **UNDERSTAND.**

AND WE WILL DIE IN IGNORANCE.

SHE BETRAYED YOU.

WE WILL NOT.

SO YOU SAY. BUT YOURS HAVE TAUGHT US **NOT** TO TRUST.

NOW IT WILL LIE WITH YOUR VICTORY TO **PROVE** YOUR WORDS AND **SAVE** US BOTH.

--GET THIS ONE **DISARMED**, BUT I HOPE YOU'VE GOT A PLAN FOR THE **OTHER TWO**, BOSS.

SPEAKING OF--

--ONE DOWN...

...TWO TO **GO**.

I DON'T SEE US **CONVINCING** SCYTHE AND VIPER IN THE TIME WE'VE GOT LEFT.

RELAY: AND HOW MUCH TIME IS *THAT?*

NOT ENOUGH.

NOT ENOUGH.

I THINK WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO **BRUTE-FORCE** THIS, JO.

AT LEAST WE'VE GOT OUR NEW **ALLIES** TO HELP OUT.

...

JO?

I'M HAVING TROUBLE WITH THIS, VIC.

IF I BELIEVE WHAT THE **MINDWITCH** TOLD YOU, **ALL** THE STUFF ABOUT THE EMPRESS, ABOUT T-SPACE...

...I'M **STRUGGLING**, HERE.

I KNOW, I'M ASKING YOU TO VIOLATE **EVERYTHING**--

FUCK, THAT **AIN'T** IT.

IT'S ONE THING TO FIGHT FOR SOMETHING YOU ***BELIEVE*** IN.

IT'S SOMETHING ELSE TO BE ***LIED*** TO SO YOU FIGHT FOR A ***LIE.***

THEN LET'S FUCKING ***FIX*** IT WHILE WE STILL ***CAN.***

WITH THE PHOBES GIVING ***SUPPORT*** WE CAN--

VICTORY, THE SITUATION HAS ***CHANGED...***

...I'M AFRAID YOU'LL BE DOING THIS BY ***YOURSELVES.***

SHIT.

RIGHT, CHANGE OF PLAN, LADIES.

WHATEVER THIS PHOBE INSIDE ME IS DOING, I'M ***ARMOR-FREE...***

"...WHICH MEANS A *RIPCORD* ACTIVATION WON'T AFFECT ME...."

TOPPLE, WHERE *WE* AT?

SAFETY'S *FREE*, DETONATOR *ARMED*--

TELL ME I'M SEEING *SHIT*.

VIC! HEADSHOT, GRAB HOLD OF HER!

HOLY SHIT, SHE'S *ALIVE!*

SCYTHE, SHE'S *STILL* ALIVE!

HOW IS THAT EVEN *POSSIBLE?*

I NEED A SECOND, HERE!

GETTING A *WEIRD* BUILDUP...

...LIKE A RIPCORD--

FIRST THE PHOBES **PULL BACK**, NOW THE OTHERS AREN'T **ANSWERING.**

SOMETHING'S **WRONG.**

MAYBE THEY **WIPED,** VIPER.

WE'D HAVE HEARD THEM **SCREAMING,** CUTTER.

KEEP IT **TIGHT,** I DON'T WANT ANY--

--THINGGSSHHIIIT--

FUCK FUCK **FUCK**---

--THE BOMB THE...

...YOU...

...TRAITORS.

GO FOR YOUR WEAPON, VIPER.

PLEASE GO FOR YOUR WEAPON.

I SHOULD KILL YOU.

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE.

WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS?

ALL OF YOU. WHY?

IT'S ACTUALLY SOMETHING *YOU* SAID, VIPER.

LOOK WHO'S *BACK* FROM THE *DEAD.*

NICE SKINSUIT, *PHOBE.*

NAH, IT'S *NOT* THAT EASY...

...IT'S NOT A *TRICK,* IT'S *ME.*

AND THAT'S THE *THING,* THAT'S WHY YOU *CAN'T* UNDERSTAND.

YEAH, YOU *LOVE* THEM, I KNOW.

IT'S ALL VERY SWEET, THEY'LL COMMIT *TREASON* OUT OF *LOVE.*

NO, NO. IT'S MORE *FUNDAMENTAL* THAN THAT.

YOU SAID THE FORGED ARE *TOOLS.*

AND *THAT'S* THE DIFFERENCE.

YOU'RE A TOOL, VIPER.

AND WE *REFUSE* TO BE.

SHWUNK

DON'T FUCK WITH MY ALPHA, BITCH.

EXECUTE ON SIGHT

...BASED ON DEBRIEF FROM RAPIER-9.

AWAITING YOUR CONFIRMATION TO PROCEED, ETERNAL.

PROCEED.

CASSANDRAS TO MY CHAMBERS.

My Dearest Carotheena–

I shudder to think how you might upon this letter, my darling sister. Best, I hope, that it is delivered to you upon its discovery by Zegfriel or another of the staff here, but – as the universe teaches us again and again – nothing can be controlled and fate laughs as it takes us by the hand. Oh, to have the vision of a Cassandra in this moment, that I might know!

Yet with such a vision, would I have been able to avoid what I must now write, what action must follow upon the laying down of my pen? While I have always known those of our House are destined for greatness, I have never myself felt enslaved to destiny. So odd to ponder now, and now too late to ponder.

I love Her, you know, and do even now. She is Eternal. She is everything. Even if all of the stories are lies, it does not diminish what She has built, what She has done for all of us. Think on it, Theena! How small we once were, and how trapped! It was She who gave us the stars. It was She who gave us our future.

It has been the pride of my life to serve our Eternal. It was the honor of my life to be called to Her Council, to be raised to such heights, above even the Court and their distractions. To be at Her side, to try to offer what guidance and insight I could.

Pride, indeed.

HOUSE MITTIN-YUR
DEATH BEFORE DISLOYALTY

Mine, I fear, not Hers. Mine, that brought this shame upon me. It is more than I can bear, dear sister, and I would not shift its weight to you or any of the others who, until this day, have been able to proudly call themselves a Mittin-Yur. What I do, I do to ensure that pride remains, and that our family's honor continues untarnished.

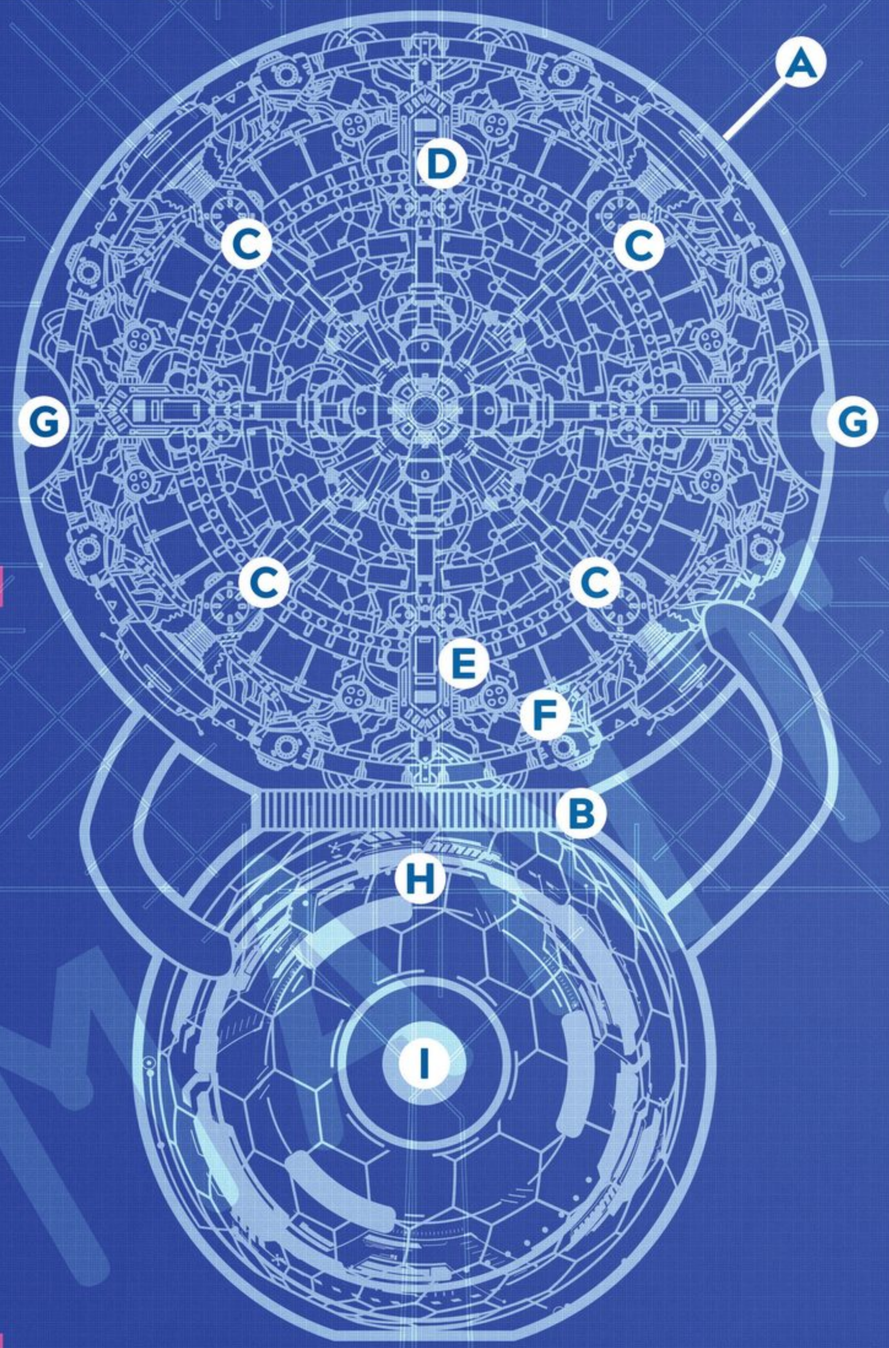
Do not think unkindly upon Her, dear sister. If time with Her taught me only one thing, it is this: no one, not even Her very Cassandras, can know what it is to be our Eternal Empress: none can know what weighs upon Her mind, heart, and soul: none can imagine what She has lost through the ages, even as She has given us so very much. My wisdom, achieved too late, is this: She is Eternal, and thus She is unknowable.

The disposition of my effects are detailed in my will, and should be of no trouble to you or the rest of the family. If possible, I should very much like to be interred at the estate on Tari, with a view of the water and the woods. It gives me great comfort to imagine myself there, at rest, and the memories of our summers when we were children.

Your loving brother,

Stanton

PROJECT:	GOLIATH-14
PROJECT LEAD:	Dr. Irinia Vostolov
SUBGROUP:	Explosive Ordnance Development T41D
CLASSIFICATION:	Onyx Nebula
SUBMISSION DATE:	ERROR



[MOUNTING BRACKETS AND TRIPOD OMITTED FOR CLARITY]

BRIEF:

MANTICORE–in compliance with Her Eternal Majesty's stated decree–has undertaken the development of a new form of explosive ordnance. The project, GOLIATH-14, has created the working framework for a methodology that allows for the creation of a small artificial singularity within a magnetic field bottle. This singularity, ringed with gravimetric wave projectors and an array of nuclear micro-warheads, creates a nearly limitless amount of deployable energy (albeit over an extremely limited duration) which is focused through the gravimetric devices and curved back onto the singularity. This creates a "lensing" effect that, upon its release at detonation, can warp spacetime and, as one development tech so colorfully described it, "tear giant holes in the universe." Contained within a relatively portable casing (which can be armored for durability in the field) the GOLIATH device is theoretically suitable for deployments where a mass casualty event at cataclysmic scale is desirable.

- **A** Armored external casing
- **B** Omnisteel bracing
- **C** Gravimetric wave projectors [experimental]
- **D** Wave projector power source
- **E** Backup power source
- **F** Magnetic field generator
- **G** Magnetic field emitters
- **H** Singularity generation module
- **I** Artificial singularity

Deep archive file packaged and transmitted to the Technion, per Imperial requisition.
Note: This archive's date/time stamps were corrupted with the deep archives, and would indicate a research effort dating back to the earliest years of the Empire itself. Data was also highly encrypted, indicating a highly secret research effort; it is highly recommended that this information be treated as potential disinformation for a long-ago intelligence effort. Caution is warranted.

DEEP ARCHIVE FILES
WARNING: DUE TO EXTREME AGE OF FILES SOME DATA LOSS MAY HAVE OCCURRED

A-AC

AL-ASHANTI CORPORATION

DEEP ARCHIVE CLASSIFIED MATERIAL
"MIDNIGHT HALO"

Office of the Director of Research and Development
New Technologies Development
Exotic Engineering Processes

Date: 22 Threemonth, Imperial Year 821
To: Chairman Omar Al-Ashanti
From: Dr. Vinsenti Benneno, R&D
RE: Development Resources Acquisition

>Routed from Al-Ashanti Corpnet/Cestus Labs to Corpnet/Primarx Corporate Arcology

Chairman Al-Ashanti:

First, congratulations on the successful launch of Al-Ashanti Mining Ventures and the acquisition of NexusDrive Aerospace. The sheer number of mining contracts to supply the shipbuilding efforts of the Imperial Navy guarantee the survival of your holdings far into the distant future. Your legacy is indeed secure, Mr. Chairman.

In regard to other matters: this office has been made aware of our place in your dealings with the Empire and the Court. Per Classified Memorandum 482393, we will of course comply fully. To that end, I am attaching a network file stack to this correspondence (keyed to your personal biosignature and retinal patterns) that outlines how the New Technologies Development division (and the Exotic Engineering Processes working group) can be scaled up to serve Her Majesty and Al-Ashanti Corporation.

In addition to an overall increase in staffing levels of no less than 38% (a minimum, I'm afraid; 62% would be ideal), it is advised to create a compensation strategy that makes it abundantly clear to potential recruits that our efforts are worthy, sincere, and above all destined for success. Financial analytics and projections are appended to file stack 382.39/FISCAL. To summarize: initial financial offers to preferred recruits should begin at no less than 25% above industry standard rates. Put simply: we need to bring in the best of the best, and to do that at the speed and effectiveness we require, we need to pay top rates.

Once recruited, these team members can be monitored and if necessary controlled by security teams, in order to ensure loyalty.

As staffing levels increase, the expansion of programs designed to meet the needs of our beloved Empress can begin in earnest. Please refer to file stack 238-694743-4 (PROJECT CADMIUM HALO) for the specific details.

CADMIUM HALO is a series of technology laboratories, each tasked with specific development efforts: CH-1 for esoteric propulsion methods, CH-2 for extradimensional mapping and detection, CH-3 for high-energy weapons development, and so on. (CH-3 subgroup codenamed PALLAS' DREAM is, in particular, showing some fascinating new ideations on personnel protection gear and combat armor.)

File stack 378059194U contains projected timelines (including financials and dev milestones for individual projects within each lab network). I have taken the liberty of consulting with the Fiscal Responsibility group to verify feasibility of budgets and dev cycles, and am assured they are well within corporate tolerances. CorpSecurity regulations and classification protocols have been maintained at **Midnight Singularity**-level clearance.

(Given the highly sensitive nature of these efforts, I should like to recommend a security/intelligence liaison from Fleet be assigned to us, to preserve secrecy and, should any breaches occur—as unlikely as that possibility may be—administer necessary "corrective" measures. My own contacts within the military are robust, but I humbly request that your own relationship with Our Eternal and Beloved Leader be leveraged to yield more immediate results.)

Respectfully submitted for your approval,

Benneno

Benneno, R&D

cc: CADMIUM HALO OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Classification: MIDNIGHT SINGULARITY

Filestack 238-694743-4 / CADMIUM HALO

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
PALLAS' DREAM

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
TRADEWIND LULLABY

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
ORACLE WIND

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
OMNIVOX AURA

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
SINGULARITY VERGE

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
HISTORY'S VEIL

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
WINGED SINCERITY

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
MENAGERIE GLYPH

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
DISCRETION'S ARMOR

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
PRESCIENT SHADOW

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
SISTER'S HARMONY

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
DISCORDANT MIASMA

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
ANVIL OF HEAVEN

SUBSTACK / PROJECT:
ARROW'S ARC

TRANSFER TO
SECURE DATAHUB

DEEP ARCHIVE CLASSIFIED MATERIAL
"MIDNIGHT HALO"

Filestack 238-694743-4 / CADMIUM HALO

Retinal scan: Approved
Project summaries follow:

PALLAS' DREAM

Classification: Dev-Technology | Cybernetics and Enhanciles

Brief: Design and creation of scalable, reliable covert medical facilities designed for rapid gestation of clones. Must include long-term education and indoctrination centers as well as specific genetic markers for [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted]. Per [redacted], teams will design and develop specialized military equipment, including powered armor and infantry weapons systems. Ref: Imperial directive [redacted].

TRADEWIND LULLABY

Classification: Dev-Aerospace | Scanning and Detection

Brief: Design, creation, and implementation of high-resolution mapping modules for use aboard scouting craft. Must interface with mobile scanning drones, Class VII and up. Ref: Imperial directive 7251.109.

ORACLE WIND

Classification: Intel | Covert Ops

Brief: Design and creation of secure housing attached to the Palace grounds, Throneworld, to house selected subjects from PALLAS' DREAM. Ref: Imperial directive[redacted].

OMNIVOX AURA

Classification: Misc. | Social Engineering

Brief: Recruitment of musicians, fine artists, dramatic performers, etc. for the creation of works that overtly or subliminally encourage loyalty to Her Eternal Majesty (May She Know Only Joy). Specific care must be taken to downplay the existence of forces exterior to the Empire. This includes elements of the supernatural (except insofar as such elements are favorable to Her Exalted Highness and/or Her agents). Ref: Imperial directive 6124.460.

SINGULARITY VERGE

Classification: Dev-Aerospace | Exotic Propulsion Systems

Brief: Continued research on non-standard approaches to faster-than-light travel; emphasis to be placed on potential extradimensional transit. Ref: Imperial directive 5109.128.

HISTORY'S VEIL

Classification: Dev-Technology | Artificial Intelligence Systems

Brief: Continued refinement of Artemis System's abandoned "Virtual Intelligence Suite" with emphasis placed on self-evolving, rapid learning systems. Subject list prepared for initial neural and cognitive mapping to form baseline code. Initial testing should be conducted using beta candidates to create a Deep Archive for covert storage of sensitive data related to She Who Rules. Ref: Imperial directive 6267.991.

WINGED SINCERITY

Classification: Dev-Military Aerospace | Combat Space Vehicle Design

Brief: Development of a long-term (one thousand years at a minimum) plan to design, build, and deploy a variety of multi-use combat spacecraft, from transports and support craft to capital interplanetary warships. Ref: Imperial directive 8274.002.

MENAGERIE GLYPH

Classification: Intelligence | Theoretical Exolinguistics

Brief: Development of methodology for communicating with intelligent life exterior to the boundaries of the Empire. Project staff to be sequestered by military intelligence operatives. These are to be lifetime positions. Ref: Imperial directive 2188.121.

DISCRETION'S ARMOR

Classification: Military | Naval Weapons Development

Brief: A permanent, ongoing program of armament development and manufacture for use by field personnel, including small arms, heavy weapons, cybernetic technology, and so forth. Ref: Imperial directive 4458.813.

DEEP ARCHIVE CLASSIFIED MATERIAL
MIDNIGHT HALO

PRESCIENT SHADOW

Classification: Intelligence | Specialized Artificial Intelligence

Brief: Development of predictive machine intelligences and surveillance software for monitoring the civilian populace (and, covertly, the military). Ref: Imperial directive 5761.098.

SISTER'S HARMONY

Classification: Royal | Human Potential — Miscellaneous

Brief: Her Majesty has decreed special efforts be undertaken to ensure the health, safety, and security of future individuals to be classified as [redacted]. Ref: Imperial General Order [redacted].

DISCORDANT MIASMA

Classification: Intelligence | Disinformation Operations

Brief: Development and deployment of specific A.I. models designed to generate plausible responses to incidences of unusual activity (for example, unexplained ship disappearances and accidents) to placate citizens of the Empire and shield ongoing intelligence operations from exposure. Ref: Imperial directive: 7783.231.

ANVIL OF HEAVEN

Classification: Military | Naval Weapons Development

Brief: Attached to DISCRETION'S ARMOR, subteams CENTAUR, MANTICORE, and MINOTAUR will be tasked with the design of high-energy experimental "planet killer" weapons systems. Ref: Imperial directive [redacted].

ARROW'S ARC

Classification: Dev-Technology | Navigation / Mapping Systems

Brief: This project is tasked with the design and implementation of navigation systems and methodologies for traveling outside of this universe and into/through a theoretical dimension at faster-than-light speeds. Ref: Imperial directive 6409.802.

DEEP ARCHIVE CLASSIFIED MATERIAL
"MIDNIGHT HALO"

AL-ASHANTI CORPORATION

OMAR AL-ASHANTI
CHAIRMAN/CEO, AL-ASHANTI CORPORATION

"There should be no limits on achievement, and no limits on ambition to achieve."

Upon inheriting the **AL-ASHANTI MINING GROUP** following the loss of his parents in the devastating **GANYMEDE MOONS INCIDENT**, Mr. Al-Ashanti wasted no time expanding his family holdings and rapidly diversifying into an interplanetary commerce titan.

While mining remains a primary industry for A-AC, the company has expanded into all manner of business efforts, including construction, shipping, machinery construction, exploration, applied military technology, computer engineering and design (with notable programs like **SOULECHO** pioneering advanced artificial intelligence creation and the conversion of "cognitive mapping" data to a format suited for electronic storage and retrieval), genetic engineering, medical and pharmaceutical development, and so very much more.

Born on the **GARRIDANO ARCHIPELAGO** on **WRENMUIR ALPHA**, he learned the intricacies of business at his father's knee, and later, at the Imperial Commerce University on Terex Gamma, graduating as Scholar Prime of a class of over 11,000 students.

Mr. Al-Ashanti saw the potential of allying closely with the Imperial Court, building relationships with numerous advisors and confidants to Her Eternal Glory, which led over time to occasionally advising the Throne. (It was this practice that culminated in A-AC's first military contracts and later the company's role as a prime supplier of technology, materiel, and services to the Imperial Navy.)

As Chairman, Mr. Al-Ashanti has been awarded (among numerous other accolades): the **PULSAR PRIZE FOR ADVANCED PAN-GALACTIC ECONOMIC THEORY**, the **CORPORATE CITIZEN ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL**, the **BELLAFORNA PRIZE FOR NOTABLE FEALTY**, a **LORDHOOD** of the **SPINWARD IMPERIAL INDUSTRIAL SECTORS**, and the official title of **ADVISORY MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO TO THE IMPERIAL COURT**.

Currently, Chairman Al-Ashanti maintains residences on the Throneworld and Far Carillon Delta (which is also home to the Al-Ashanti headquarters omniplex).

The structure of existence is a machine.
Be ever mindful of the gears.

Koan 0001

Scrolls of the Cassandras

E.V.I.L. SPEAKS

__SESSION BEGINS__

This unit is gratified by readers' continued interest in the exploits of FORGED team SCIMITAR-3. As always, queries should be sent via Permaweb to:

__ForgedAskEvil@gmail.com__

Please mark any queries as "OK TO PRINT"; this unit reserves the right to edit queries for length, clarity, and/or accuracy.

Virtual community access is available via Permaweb under HEADING_LAZARUS_DISCORD_CHANNEL_THE FORGED and may be accessed at the following node:

https://discord.gg/lazarus-comic

Embed scansequence to same follows:

MESSAGE BEGINS

CHRONAL ANOMALY DETECTED

Spacetime disruption has occurred. Signal lag between this unit's present timeline and the temporal positioning of user base has created a communications blockage. Limited correspondence is available in this installment. It is possible that unusual events occurring in T-space—such as the events depicted within—have created an energy "ripple effect" that is responsible for the communications interruption.

Further investigation is required.

The unit's research into the availability of so-called "artificial intelligence" in the user base's era has proven troublesome. Historical data accessible in this unit's time period are largely incomplete or are profoundly inaccurate. Some records do indicate a period (roughly within the era of the end user) of extreme infatuation with the development of rudimentary machine intelligence; these records do not contain an abundance of positive outcomes.

A.I. is currently defined as computer/machine technology that simulates human intelligence in order to solve problems at speed and/or to undertake tasks that would normally require human intervention (piloting a vehicle, for example). The unit's analysis of the state of A.I., from the end user perspective, is clear: in your era, the prominent purveyors of artificial intelligence (notably in creative fields) appear to enjoy the mere act of disruption and the notoriety such disruption

creates among the disrupted.

[Tangent] Under the rule of the Empress, machine intelligence is rarely if ever used in the creation of works of art; fiction, music, art, drama, and so forth have been deemed by Imperial decree to be necessary and vital to a healthy and functioning human society. Individuals pursuing a path in the arts are revered and supported, and Imperial institutions of higher learning emphasize the creation of work that is novel, as the quality of "newness" is highly prized by Her Eternal Majesty. Using machine intelligence to create works of "art" is, by future law, harmful to the human condition.

Further, the end user's understanding of how humans think and reason is insufficient. Cognitive mapping technologies that can provide the detail and granularity of the human mind do not yet exist; thus contemporary efforts to create genuine machine intelligence are built on a wobbling and faulty foundation. It is this unit's analysis that such information leads to malfunctions and errors [called "hallucinations"] that render the results deeply flawed.

A study of this unit's own neural and cognitive base code [programming derived from intensely high-resolution scanning methods] reveals that the framework for E.V.I.L. architecture is derived from a hybrid of human intelligence [notably problem-solving ability and empathy, which have been determined to be necessary for healthy, hallucination-free results] and canine characteristics that can be summed up as "drive" and "loyalty."

Late Imperial-era A.I. modules such as the E.V.I.L. system are capable of genuine emotion, but also retain control over those "feelings" [including the discretion to suspend emotional responses as needed]. Long-term contact with specific human individuals allows the A.I. to experience more efficient communications with humans, as well as more effectively anticipating outcomes.

To summarize: one cannot simulate the human mind unless one fully knows the human mind.

Reader Robert S. has submitted his canine allies Noah and Panda for review. This unit deems them to be excellent representatives of breed and species.

SUBJECTS: Noah and Panda

Finally: The third volume of THE FORGED will be available for purchase in pop culture ephemera emporiums on September 25, 2024. It contains the complete log of OPERATION: ABADDON [issues 7–9].

You are encouraged to purchase and enjoy the exploits of SCIMITAR-3.

__SESSION ENDS__

THE FORGED™

RUCKA · TRAUTMANN · HENDERSON · WOODARD · MAHER

VOL. 03 THE ABADDON STRIKE

IN STORES SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

NEXT ISSUE:

NEW STORY ARC BEGINS!

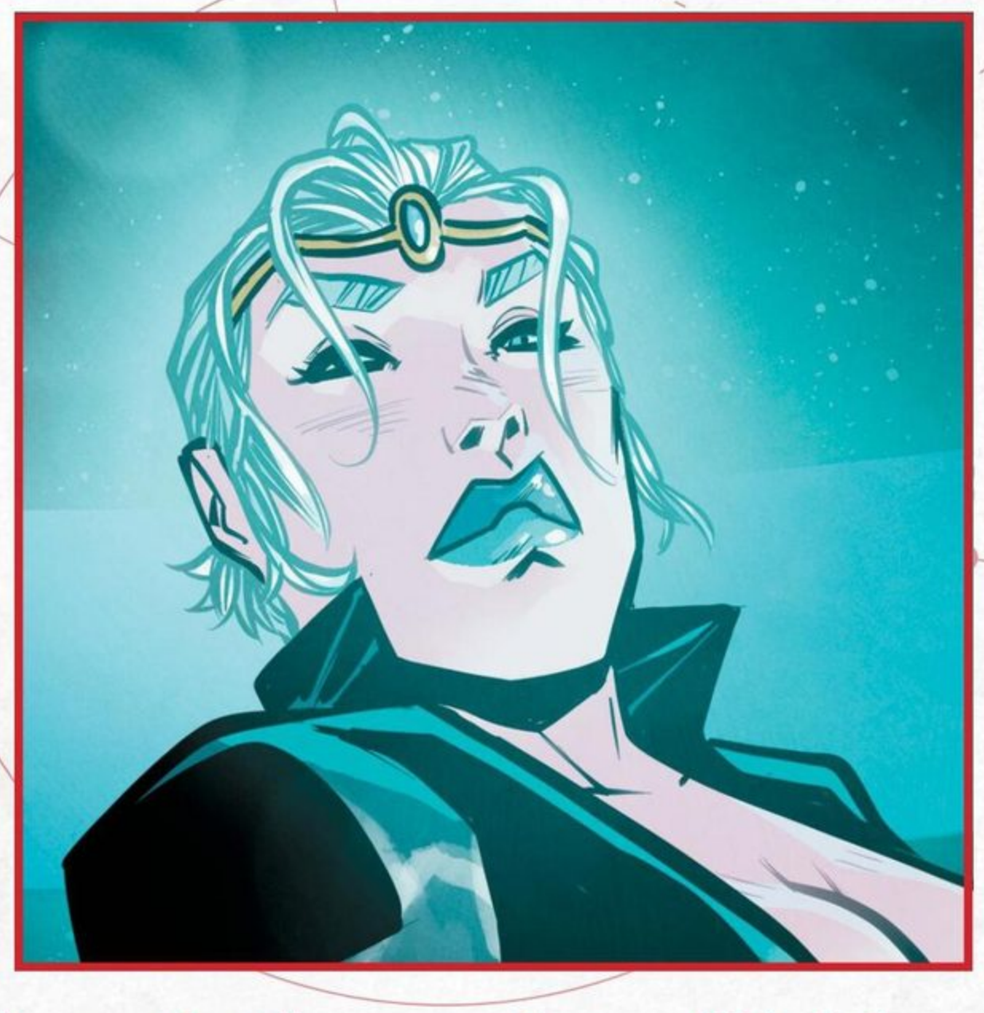
Vic and the rest of the SCIMITAR-3 team have done the unthinkable and defied the Empress Herself. Even with their new allies, the mysterious aliens known as the Phobes, they are outgunned, on the run, and hunted by Her Eternal Majesty's mighty legions.

As the fugitive Forged struggle to stay one step ahead of their pursuers, the Empress's machinations continue. What roles will the Cassandras and General Davian play in the inevitable confrontation?

Plus: the secret origin of the Empress is revealed!

WANTED FOR TREASON

March 26, 2025



"We are the **foundation** and **scaffold** upon which this Empire was **constructed.**"

Adventure / SciFi / Space Opera

RATED **M** / MATURE

ZONE